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The Sub Episode

The temptation is to dismiss as another example of science-fictiony foolishness the Central Intelligence Agency's plan to recover a sunken Soviet submarine resting 17,000 feet below the surface of the Northern Pacific.

Surely, this entire episode smacks of our best fantasy imagination:

A reclusive millionaire clandestinely constructing a contraption looking like something out of Jules Verne; the device snaking three miles under the sea to have its huge claw grasp a Soviet submarine whose location only our Navy knew; the oddly touching burials-at-sea conducted for the Soviet seamen by the U.S. Navy; the breaking of the Soviet sub's hull, and the consequent loss of its section most important to the United States; the decision to make a second effort to retrieve the lost section; the burglarizing of a safe in the millionaire's company — a safe containing information about the entire operation; and — over the objections of the director of the CIA — public disclosure of the operation by the nation's leading yellow journalist, who thereby blew the second attempt right out of the water.

Yet it all apparently happened. And about it, two essential thoughts:

(1) *Regarding the way the public learned of the operation.* Over the radio, Columnist Jack Anderson related details of the operation. Justifications for his having done so — justifications based on "the public's right to know" — are beside the point. Given the magnitude of such a story, and given the degree to which disclosure of it can enhance one's reputation as a diligent journalist, a man such as Jack Anderson will opt for disclosure, and to hell with the damage that disclosure can do to the United States.

Both *The New York Times* and *The Los Angeles Times* deserve credit for not disclosing the operation when they first heard about it several months ago. Perhaps they have learned something from their mistaken decisions some years back to publish the stolen Pentagon Papers. *The New York Times* did not disclose it evidently because the newspaper believed that the value of the information gleaned from the operation did not justify disclosing it, and thus jeopardizing U.S.-Soviet *détente*. But *The Los Angeles Times* did not disclose the operation precisely because that newspaper did understand the profound value of the information that the first retrieval had brought to the U.S. — and the even more valuable information that the U.S. might obtain through the planned second retrieval effort. Wrote *The Los Angeles Times'* Jerry Cohen and George Reasons about the information derived from the retrieval:

> What the analysts discovered was of critical importance and it was this: The Russians had modified the 1958-model sub to fire not only nuclear-tipped torpedoes but Polaris-type missiles as well. The experts also were able to project the current state of Soviet nuclear submarine technology. What the CIA crews recovered led them to believe the remaining section of the sub would yield even more valuable data, possibly including the key to the Russian code. As a result, the CIA won the approval of President Ford about two months ago to undertake a second mission to recover the critical section still on the ocean floor.

According to subsequent reports in *The Washington Post*, some code information and some Soviet missiles may have been obtained in the retrieval that did succeed.

(2) *Regarding the damage caused by public disclosure of the operation.* The Soviet reaction to the retrieval is not yet known, but the degree of expressed Soviet wrath will be calculated to accrue to the benefit of the Soviet Union. Yet the greatest benefit to the Soviet Union — and make no mistake, Jack Anderson has done the Soviets a considerable service — will derive from the damage that disclosure has done, and will do, to the CIA.

Four investigations of the CIA are underway. The CIA currently is this nation's suppositional Enemy No. 1. In the words of Ray S. Cline — deputy director of the CIA from 1962 to 1966 — writing in the February 27 *New York Times*: "A great many critics of United States policy in the 1950s and 1960s, especially the young ones who grew up in the era of retreat from Vietnam and of worldwide *détente*, have applauded United States withdrawal from the clandestine international political arena. They consider covert activities incompatible with international law, morality, and the fundamental principles of our open society."

Yet, he continues, given the intentions of the Soviet Union, it is doubtful that the U.S. should "be too high-minded" about clandestine operations by the CIA.

Public disclosure of the CIA's submarine retrieval provides further ammunition to those who have the CIA under attack. And that attack is related closely to America's new — and growing — isolationism. If it can be successfully argued that the U.S. should withdraw its support from long-time allies around the world because the Communists no longer have designs on us, it can be argued with equal success that the U.S. should draw in its intelligence-gathering forces as well. The inescapable conclusion of such arguments is that the CIA is a relic of the past — a relic that, as seen in the submarine retrieval, can only get us into trouble.

The truth remains, however, that as Communists on the battlefield rush in when America withdraws support of its allies, so the Soviets will rush in to fill the vacuum left by the withdrawal of the CIA from useful intelligence operations. The disspiriting disclosure of the CIA's submarine retrieval has removed yet another of the CIA's underpinnings, hence weakening it, and — by necessary extension — weakening the United States.